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Local pork takes big bite

It's no secret that the bottom has all but fallen out of the swine market.

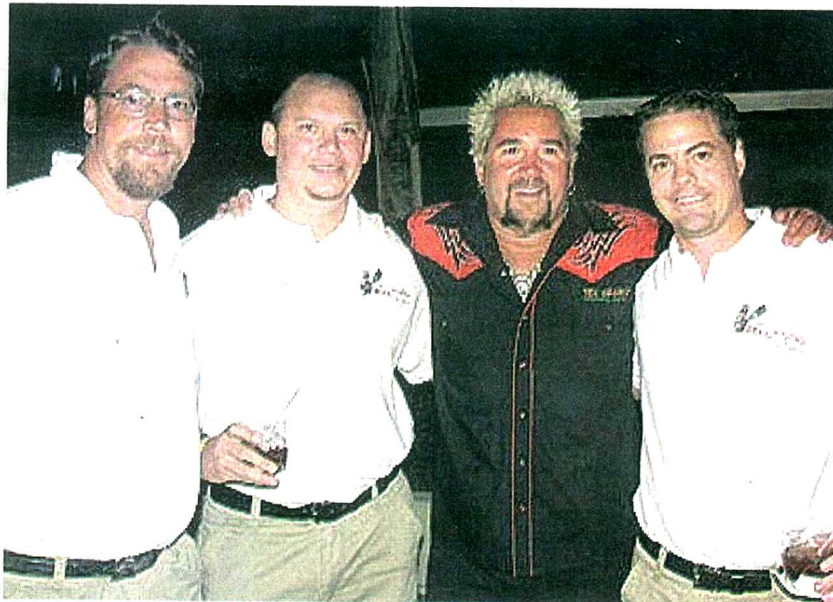
And even a spring upturn in pork prices rapidly turned sour with the onset of the H1N1 virus. Once commonly known as swine flu, the virus has closed virtually all channels of international trade to pork producers.

"It's a case of overproduction," says retired Central City pork producer Dan Erickson, and the glut is just too much for a purely domestic market to absorb.

Enter Erickson's son Justin and his business partner Wes Hansen.

The duo, both born and raised on Nebraska hog farms and friends since they met in college, hit on the idea of forming a company that would market midwest pork in small farmer's markets in and around their current homes in the Phoenix and Tucson, Arizona, area.

And with Justin's older brother supplying fresh pork with no antibiotics or growth hormones from the 4th generation family farm in Central City and father Dan's advice on marketing and recipe and



His Kind of Guys

Central City pork producer **Russ Erickson** (left) joins Pork on a Fork co-founders **Wes Hansen** and **Justin Erickson** (right) in a photo with celebrity chef **Guy Fieri** at Anaheim's August 8-9 Celebrity Food Show.

preparation technique (perfected through years of operating Smokin' Dan's BBQ of local fame), Erickson and Hansen were ready to go.

In the five short months

since their venture Pork on a Fork began operating, Justin says the pair have gone from an initial order of 3 hogs and 500 pounds of pork from

Russ's farm to a recent order for 14 hogs (2500 pounds of brats, loin, bacon, and other cuts).

The pair warehouse their

Pork...

product in commercial space in Phoenix, and then spend their weekends and time off selling fresh Nebraska pork to an ever-increasing flow of customers.

"It's really grown beyond my expectations," says Justin, who adds that he and Wes have a long term goal of growing steadily to the point of being able to step away from their "real" jobs.

The venture took a significant leap toward that goal when the Pork on a Fork brand was listed with Foodzie, a San Francisco-based online marketplace.

The brand's presence on Foodzie was noticed by Food Network personality and restaurant owner Guy Fieri, whose agents contacted Erickson and Hansen for more information.

At southern California's Celebrity Food Show in Anaheim in early August, Fieri featured Pork on a Fork products exclusively during his on-stage cooking demonstrations, and the ball really started rolling.

Since then, says Justin, what started as an attempt to add value to a raw product and "help out the family farm" has received further invitations to food shows and venues across the country.